

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
February 14, 2006**

The regular meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9 A.M., on February 14, 2006, in Room 1D2 of the Transportation Building in Olympia, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair O'Neal, Ed Barnes, Bob Distler, Elmira Forner, Carol Moser and Dale Stedman.

MINUTES APPROVAL

It was moved by the Commission to approve the minutes for June 29, 2005 Chelan and October 26, 2005 Tacoma local meetings. The motion passed unanimously.

GRAY NOTEBOOK QUARTERLY UPDATE

Daniela Bremmer, Director, Strategic Assessment, Strategic Planning and Programming, presented the draft Gray Notebook for review.

Highway Safety

Pat Morin, Manager, Systems Analysis and Priority Programming, provided an overview of high accident locations and corridors in the state. The Department reviews accident history for all state highways every two years to identify high accident locations and corridors. The Department constantly evaluates its methods in order to ensure that the best locations for safety improvements are identified. He specifically addressed actions that have been taken as preventative measures on corridors to meet safety needs. The Department also examines pedestrian and bicycle safety-crossing fatalities in order to determine where the need for crossing upgrades or installations are needed.

Commissioner Moser questioned what was being done to address the accident rate on the SR 99 corridor and the effected cities.

Dick Albin, Assistant State Design Engineer, Policy Standards and Roadway Safety, shared highlights of safety project evaluations noting that there has been a reduction in fatalities and injury accidents due to safety improvements. Cable median barrier use on corridors to prevent crossovers has been beneficial as a safety improvement. The Department reviews data twenty-four months before and after safety projects to determine safety improvement statistics.

Ted Trepanier, State Traffic Engineer, briefed the Commission regarding the use of low-cost enhancements that aide in the prevention of accidents.

Environmental Programs

Megan White, Director, Environmental Services, provided an overview of the Department's seven core elements to environmental management systems. Washington State maintains the highest water quality possible.

Policy requires that at least 20 percent of all projects with substantial potential for water quality impacts be monitored. When transportation projects create unavoidable wetland impacts, wetlands are enhanced, restored, created or preserved to achieve the no net loss policy.

The Department monitors sites to determine if they have met standards. It is expected that there will be improved ecological success on replacement of wetlands sites. Overall the Department is exceeding program goals.

Pavement Conditions

Tom Baker, State Pavement engineer, briefed the Commission regarding the annual assessment of pavement condition ratings. According to the 2004 pavement condition survey the percentage of pavement in poor condition increased slightly. The Department continues to work with the University of Washington to enhance the models used for predicting Portland Cement Concrete pavement performance. There is increasing concern that the existing pavement is showing signs of increased deterioration and will require some type of repair or rehabilitation action before 2013.

Highway Maintenance: Integrated Vegetation Management

Rico Baroga, Maintenance Policy Manager, explained how the program creates and supports roadside plant communities to minimize long-term maintenance needs. The Department's use of herbicide to manage roadside vegetation has decreased by 30 percent since 2003. Most reductions are due to a shift in practice in the maintenance of vegetation along highway edges. The Department along with the University of Washington is in the process of establishing a series of field trials to evaluate the feasibility and long-term cost/benefit of the most practical alternatives through research process. It is anticipated that it will take approximately three years to determine if the research yields success.

Project Delivery Update

Paula Hammond, Chief of Staff, John Conrad, Assistant Secretary for Engineering and Regional Operations and Greg Selstead, Director, Project Control and Reporting, provided an overview of Capital Project Delivery Programs and Nickel projects. The Department's 2005-07 capital program focuses on project and program delivery from all fund sources. A major challenge to the program's delivery was the uncertainty in long-term levels of capital investment for highways. This uncertainty has made investment choices difficult for the construction industry, consulting firms, and the Department's staffing, as well as permitting agencies in determining workload. The beige page style and format will be modified to reflect more specific detail in project summaries. An overview of the Nickel project delivery program and milestones was provided (information on this item can be found in the Gray Notebook Beige Pages).

TPAB PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND BENCHMARKS STUDY – FINAL TPAB DECISIONS AND FINAL REPORT

John Ostrowski, Vice Chair, Transportation Performance Audit Board (TPAB), explained TPAB's role. He noted that with the passage of the initiative last year, moving performance audits to the State Auditor's Office, TPAB's role has become redundant. TPAB has merged the benchmarks and goals and project prioritization process and criteria into one study that will be presented today.

Both of these efforts designed streamlined accountability into a functional system. In summary, a more logical, transparent approach needs to be taken in order for accountability to be the performance and cost saver. Recommendation on capital performance measures for the TPA will be presented at a later date.

Kathy Scanlan, Cedar River Group, explained that they were contracted by TPAB to perform a study of performance goals, benchmarks and a 10-year investment criteria, as a result of Legislative direction given to TPAB. The methodology taken was to do a thorough review of literature on performance measurements, general accounting guidelines, federal laws, state laws and best practices. The objectives are to improve the use of performance measures for external accountability, communication and reporting, relate performance and investment criteria, distinguish between transportation system performance, state agencies and the Department of Transportation to identify and consistently report on a few key accountability measures. She emphasized that the Department, as well as the Legislature, realize that this is an evolving science. The TPAB's Legislative recommendations:

- Amend 47.01.012 to substitute the proposed three overarching goals with system measures for the current benchmarks, ensuring alignment between the measures and the overarching transportation goals.
- Amend 47.01.012 to have WSDOT submit an annual report on the attainment of transportation goals, objectives and measures.
- Amend 47.05.030 and 47.05.051 to require the ten-year investment program to relate to the three overarching goals with a link to the annual report on the attainment.
- Adopt proviso language that will require a report back to the Legislature from the Governor, Office of Financial Management and Department of Transportation by December 31, 2006.
- Adopt proviso language to require TPAB or its successor to recommend objectives that would implement the state transportation goals for all authorized and funded state transportation agencies.
- Planning process evaluation – report by June 30, 2006.

In closing Mr. Ostrowski and Commissioners discussed public attitudes and perceptions towards transportation goals, priorities and accountability.

PUBLIC AND LEGISLATOR COMMENT PERIOD

Don Briscoe, Legislative Program Director, Local 17 Professional and Technical Engineers, expressed his pleasure in the approval of the apprenticeship program.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Jennifer Ziegler, Director, Governmental Affairs, WSDOT, shared highlights of agency request legislation for 2005-07.

At this time there are nine pieces of legislation. Today is the cutoff for bills that do not pass in the house of origin, unless it is necessary to pass the budget. The Department requested Design Build Construction on smaller projects – this legislation has passed the House and is moving in the Senate; Apprenticeship – requires the Department to use apprentices on projects, there are two bills moving, the House and Senate versions have both passed, and are still being discussed; Traffic Safety Cameras in construction work zones –this bill is not moving as well as expected, but is on the second reading in the House; Commute Trip Reduction Program changes – both House and Senate versions are moving; WSF Collective Bargaining changes to process – both House and Senate versions have passed their respective houses; Negotiate for use of the Old Milwaukee Rail Corridor – three year extension passed the Senate and is on the second reading; License Tire Chain vendors to install chains over mountain passes – passed the Senate; Joint agency legislation with the Department of Licensing to clarify the legal incidence of the tax – to address the tribal fuel tax issue – passed the Senate; Change the vessel procurement process – requesting contract award to the best value rather than lowest bidder – passed the Senate.

Paula Hammond, Chief of Staff, provided an update regarding the status of the Palouse Coulee City Railroad agreement. In 2003 the Legislature provided the Department funds to purchase parts of the rail line – the PV Hooper, PL Line and the CW Line. Some of the funds were in the 2003-05 biennium and some in the 2005-07 biennium. The Department negotiated with WATCO, the owner/operator of the lines, but due to WATCO's uncertainty as to whether or not it would continue to serve the CW Line negotiations discontinued on that portion of the purchase. At this time the Department, WATCO and the Legislature are discussing options and how to move forward. At this time the Department is working with interested parties to form partnerships and determine if acquisition of the CW Line is feasible.

Secretary MacDonald commented that the recent inflation trend in construction costs is eight percent per year since 2001. The Department has a strategy to manage these costs and their inflationary impact on projects. He moved on to share information regarding a briefing given to the Senate Transportation Committee on Highway Congestion "What Is To Be Done". The briefing highlighted three things that can be done about congestion: Build new capacity, operate the system more efficiently and effectively, and implement some form of value pricing. He explained that HOT lanes are appearing all around the country because it's time to make the laws of market economics help solve the traffic congestion problem. Value pricing will come to pay economic dividends far in excess of the receipt of tolling revenues. Revenues will be used to help finance transportation system investments and operations, and highways will be productive at full capacity again. Savings and safety will be realized when people are no longer traveling on congested freeways.

The Secretary noted that Governor Gregoire requested that the Department prepare a report in order to assess the hazard of rock fall on Snoqualmie Pass – I 90. The report can be found at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/I90/Rockslides/Report.htm>.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON ELECTRONIC TOLL COLLECTIONS ON THE TACOMA NARROWS BRIDGE

Frank Wilson, Frank Wilson & Associates, Inc., explained that the study focused on the most efficient way to collect tolls and public attitude.

The survey asked questions of local residents about trips per week, commute time, and what their knowledge of tolling is. It also posed other questions about the tolling schedule and the means of collecting the toll whether it's manual or electronic, their feelings about transponders and the ETC system. The outcome indicated that the public has considerable skepticism about the use of toll revenues, there is a preference for the ETC over manual and the use of transponders is favorable although the strongest supporters are commercial users.

Most bridge users have moved beyond resistance to the project and are now focusing on how to use the system to greatest efficiency. An in-depth conversation took place regarding public attitude towards the use of transponders, fare setting and electronic toll collection (refer to agenda item #6 for further information).

TACOMA NARROWS BRIDGE TOLL SETTING PROCESS

David Pope, Toll Systems Manager, WSDOT, briefed the Commission regarding the toll setting process. He provided an overview of the Code Reviser filing process and how the tolls rates would be set according to the WAC schedule.

Commissioner Distler expressed concerns regarding the Commission's role and available flexibility in setting the initial toll schedule.

Mr. Pope assured him that there would be further discussion on the matter.

AMTRAK PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Elizabeth O'Donoghue, Director, Corridor Development West, Amtrak, shared a bit of Amtrak's history emphasizing that the focus is on the future. With growth in freight rail traffic there is an impact on passenger rail, especially reliability due to rail capacity issues. There is a need for better operational efficiencies and expanded capacity. The one thing that is needed is a capital funding source at the federal level. She outlined long-range goals for Amtrak service highlighting major strategic reform initiatives. Future challenges will include providing capacity to relieve increasing congestion, customer service, more flexibility to better respond to the market, operating efficiency and lastly funding capital and operation.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m., on February 15, 2006.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DAN O'NEAL, Chair

Absent
DICK FORD, Vice-Chair

EDWARD BARNES, Member

CAROL MOSER, Member

ELMIRA FORNER, Member

ROBERT S. DISTLER, Member

DALE STEDMAN, Member

DOUGLAS MACDONALD, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Administrator

DATE OF APPROVAL